

Hagar

“THOU GOD SEEST ME”

Genesis 16 & 21



Hagar’s story can easily get lost in Sarah’s because the covenant line, and therefore the Bible, follows Sarah’s child, Isaac, and his posterity. It’s also easy to make Hagar out to be the opposition in Sarah’s life. Maybe we recognize Sarah as the daughter of the covenant and because she and Hagar sometimes struggled with each other (Genesis 16 & 21), we place Hagar in the role of the villain. But Hagar has a beautiful story of her own that clearly shows God’s love for her.

Hagar was Sarah’s handmaid. When Sarah couldn’t have children for many years, she suggested that Abraham “go in unto” (Genesis 16:2) Hagar and have a child with her. It was not an uncommon practice at that time to give a handmaid to a husband to bear children. Hagar became pregnant by Abraham. After conceiving, feelings became tense between Hagar and Sarah. Twice this tension sent Hagar away from the family (Genesis 16:7-14; 21:14-21) and both times she was visited by an angel that reassured her that God was aware of her afflictions and cared about her.

The first time Hagar fled, she was visited by the angel who told her to return and that she would bear a son and that her seed would be multiplied exceedingly. Hearing these promises from the Lord as delivered by the angel, Hagar testified that she felt God’s love for her and God’s awareness of her challenges when she said, “Thou God seest me” (Genesis 16:13). Maybe she exclaimed this in surprise, maybe she reaffirmed something she knew, but in that moment, she understood that God was with her and saw her in her struggles. This beautiful knowledge was also reflected in the name of the well where she first met the angel, Beer-lahai-roi, which means *the well of the Living One who sees*.

When Hagar’s son was born, he was called Ishmael, which means *God hears*, reconfirming Hagar’s appreciation of God’s awareness of her. However, this didn’t mean that her trials were over. Later, after more tension, Hagar and Ishmael were forced to flee the family again, this time for good and with very little to sustain them. When they ran out of water in the wilderness, Hagar sat Ishmael under a shrub and went a little way off, sure that they would die. Again, the angel visited her and opened her eyes to a well nearby, saving their lives.

This is the last we know of Hagar other than that God was with her son as he grew. From the scriptures about her we can see that Hagar knew that God knew and loved her, even when life was difficult.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU STUDY HAGAR:

1. The apocryphal book of Jasher (apocryphal means stories from Bible times that are not part of canonized scripture) states that “Hagar learned all the ways of Sarai as Sarai taught her. She was not in any way deficient in following her good ways.” This indicates that these two women had a relationship of respect. Yet at times, Sarah and Hagar seemed to struggle with feelings of envy for each other that led to conflict. In our day, it’s easy to compare ourselves with other women and develop feelings of envy or inferiority. Reflect on what you can learn from Hagar’s situation and from the text as it describes God’s love for both Hagar and Sarah. How can you see other women as good and see yourself as good, even when your life or choices are very different from theirs?

2. What qualities do you admire in Hagar as she speaks with the angel in Genesis 16:7-14?

3. Hagar is told to return to her mistress (Genesis 16:9), the very thing she was fleeing, and to submit to her. When have you felt like God required you to face the thing that was challenging you most? What blessings have come to you when you’ve followed God’s guidance in those times?

4. Like Hagar when she was met by an angel in the desert, when are times that you’ve felt “thou God seest me” and become aware of God’s knowledge of and love for you?

5. In Genesis 21:19, God opens Hagar’s eyes to the well of water in front of her so that she can drink and give her son water. Are there times when blessings haven’t seemed immediately obvious, but then looking back you can see them more clearly? When are times that God has opened your eyes to the blessings in your life?

WOMEN IN SCRIPTURE STUDY GUIDE